

# PRESS RELEASE

## House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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### **OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER**

*Full Committee Hearing on Ballistic Missile Defense*

This morning the committee continues its consideration of the fiscal year 2004 defense authorization request with a review of the ballistic missile defense programs.

It was almost 20 years ago to the day – March 23, 1983 – that President Ronald Reagan questioned the logic and wisdom of our strategic policy of Mutually Assured Destruction or “MAD” and thereby challenged the same scientists and engineers who created our system of nuclear deterrence with the task of developing the means to render these weapons “impotent and obsolete”.

Over the years, Congress and the nation has engaged in a vigorous debate over the merit of this change in strategic policy. However, in 1999, Congress passed on a bipartisan basis H.R. 4 – the National Missile Defense Act of 1999 – officially committing the United States to the deployment of a national missile defense system “as soon as is technologically possible.”

While much has transpired since President Reagan’s visionary speech, today we finally stand on the threshold of turning that that vision into reality.

This Administration deserves great credit in recognizing the urgent need to both change the strategic arms control framework and pursue all prudent technological avenues to achieve this goal.

Last year, the United States exercised its legal right to withdraw from the obsolete and counterproductive Anti-Ballistic Missile or ABM Treaty. Contrary to the dire predictions of some, the world did not end and strategic stability did not collapse. In fact, most of the world hardly seemed to notice or care. If anything, the international community has become more attuned to the problem of the proliferation of strategic weapons and the means to deliver them, and more focused on developing the means to defeat them. ABM was simply a treaty for another era.

By ridding ourselves from the artificial constraints of this treaty, we can now fully explore all options for basing sensors and weapons to provide the most comprehensive defense possible.

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Accordingly, the Department of Defense has already conducted a number of important test activities that would have likely been prohibited by the ABM Treaty.

Most recently, President Bush announced in December the decision to begin fielding an initial defensive operational capability beginning in the fall of 2004. The budget now before us supports this decision by requesting an additional 1.5 billion dollars over the next two years to increase the number of ground-based interceptors planned for the Pacific ballistic missile defense test bed from five to as many as twenty.

The request also would equip three of our Aegis-capable cruisers with as many as twenty of our developmental Navy upper-tier interceptors, and five times that number of Aegis-capable destroyers with upgrades to their tracking radars.

While this decision will likely prompt a further round of debate in the Congress, I believe the results of our test program over the past two years are a cause for confidence and optimism and that we must push forward to field an operational capability as quickly and prudently as possible. That said, these are merely initial steps and much more work remains to be done.

Let me note in closing that if the world's most destructive weapons were launched at the United States – either by accident or with malevolent intent – today there is still nothing can do to stop them. It would be the grimmest day this nation has ever seen.

Were we able to stop only one of those missiles, the result would hardly be less tragic, but the number of lives saved could easily be measured in the hundreds of thousands. Given the stakes, we have no choice but to move forward and eliminate this glaring vulnerability as rapidly as possible.

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